



WWF SCHOOLS' CASE STUDIES SERIES

Working towards Education for Sustainable Development

This case study explores how school grounds can be used as a catalyst to enable pupils to become actively involved in planning and implementing a variety of decisions about the school, related to the environment and sustainable development.

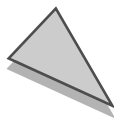
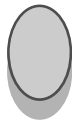
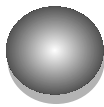
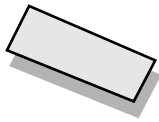
These range from finding the area of a paving slab and contributing to an energy policy for the school, to participating in a consultation with respect to Local Biodiversity Action Plans. If this appears daunting, don't be put off – read on to discover how manageable targets, some lateral thinking and a lot of enthusiasm can lead to remarkable achievements in a small rural community.

Craigellachie – a friendly habitat for all

Setting the scene

Craigellachie village, our local environment, nestles on the hillside overlooking the River Spey. A hundred years ago, the school was built at the summit of the village, offering spectacular views over the valley. With such an inspirational backdrop, this could hardly be described as an area of environmental deprivation. However, even in 1899 environmental issues were to the fore! A number of objections were raised concerning the suitability of the site for the new school, due to the possible contamination from “the odour arising from the distillery refuse”. The HMI of the day were called in to decide on the issue. Meanwhile the complainants are rumoured to have deployed several people to “stir up the distilling residuum with poles”, presumably to enhance the impact! Their efforts were in vain – an enquiry concluded that their fears were unfounded and the building of our present school went ahead as planned.

Almost one hundred years later we still had no problems with distillery refuse. Instead, our main environmental concern was a rather featureless playground which often became a sea of mud in wet weather. In addition, the vast expanse of bare grass in the school grounds provided a stark contrast to the magnificent views over the surrounding countryside. Something had to be done. Action was necessary and action was taken.



We hope that by sharing some of our successes and challenges we can help you to develop and use your school grounds in ways that can support Education for Sustainable Development. Don't expect major changes to happen overnight. This is a long-term commitment and is one that has to be constantly reviewed – we started back in 1993! Nor can we offer this as a recipe for success. Every school is unique and will require an individual approach. However, we can guarantee that using school grounds as a vehicle to deliver Education for Sustainable Development will take you on many adventures, provide stimulating experiences, and numerous opportunities for just having fun.

1993 – Making a start

Like many schools, we embarked on our school grounds improvements by following advice offered in recommended guidelines. We applied for grant-aid from Scottish Natural Heritage and established a management group. Our first discussions focused on the need to create an interesting, lively and ecologically diverse area that would benefit both the children and their environment. From the start we wanted to involve the children as much as possible. Our first task was to work with them to draw up a school charter.

Focus on developments that will benefit both the children and their environment



Involve the children in democratic decision-making from the start.

Our Charter

Action for a sustainable environment

- To establish and maintain a variety of habitats and feeding stations.
- Generally care about and for all things that live in our grounds.
- Increase our awareness and understanding by watching and learning about the plants and animals, and the conditions in which they live.
- To behave and act in an environmentally friendly way eg respect all living things.
- Take time to sit, watch and enjoy.
- Share our grounds with our friends and neighbours.



Action for children

- Create an interesting place to spend our free time, eg quiet corner, activity area.
- Provide opportunities to learn in, from and about our environment.
- Join in the making and care of all things we have planned.
- Learn to share life happily with all our partners in our environment.

The following photographs, chosen by the pupils themselves, give a snapshot of the development – this is not intended to be a blueprint for the perfect playground. Like all schools, we have experienced the inevitable ‘ups and downs’ and some of our plans have been abandoned altogether. However, when you focus on the process rather than the product, everything can be viewed in a positive light – most of the time!

The pupils' story



Our playground still looks like a building site! What next?



Our mural



Here are the Wendy House, sand pit, picnic table and cut up logs.



Mr McKenna showed us how to build a wall. He told us about the history of drystone dykes and about their uses. Our dads helped too. The money was provided through a grant from the construction industry through Moray Education Business Partnership.



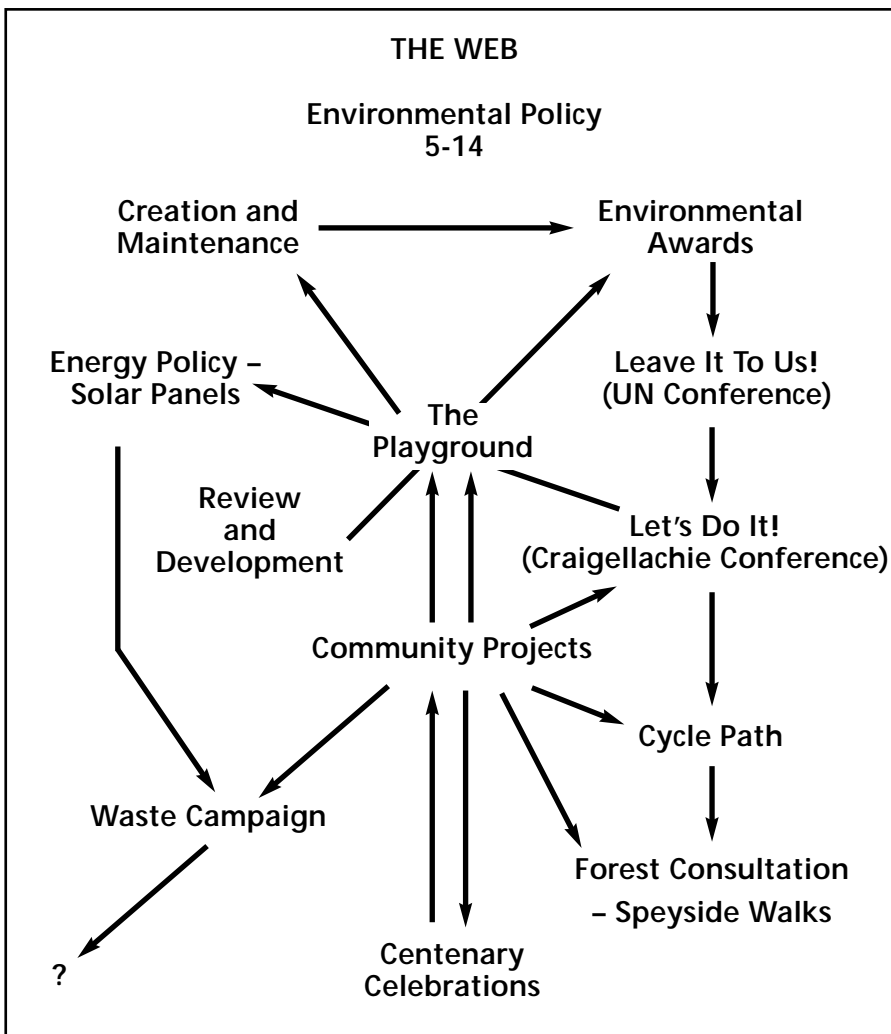
These are children from P1 and P2 (5-6 year olds) playing on the new tyres.



Ugh! Now we have to weigh these food scraps. Scientific investigation into waste is hard work!

The teachers' story

The school grounds development has become an integral part of our lives. As such, it naturally features in development plans, policy decisions and the daily curriculum. It is important to note that this is not a one-off project: this is our policy in practice.



There is little doubt that the development and use of our school grounds allowed the children to acquire a wide range of environmental knowledge and skills which could be transferred into different contexts. Self-esteem was raised, and pupils became increasingly confident in expressing their own ideas about local and global issues. This naturally led to involvement in environmental projects, competitions, conferences and community consultations.

ESD should be an integral part of school life, featuring in development plans, policy decisions and the daily curriculum. 'Events' must link with ongoing work.

Self-esteem is fundamental to sustainability - it's hard to value your environment and contribute to its improvement if you don't feel you have value.



ESD helps children to make connections so they can apply their understanding in different contexts.

Environmental Awards

It is difficult to ensure that awards don't become the driving force behind an initiative. We tried to avoid this by finding ways to directly link competitions into our Environmental Studies Policy Web. All environmental programmes need moments of pause in order to celebrate their existence, mark their success, or help change their direction. Used in this way, awards can be extremely valuable. Of course, there is no doubt that some prizes have provided very useful funding for us. For example, we used the £1,000 from our BT Environmental Award to raise another £4,000, allowing us to build a much needed all-weather games area. However, perhaps more importantly, the resultant radio and press coverage has allowed the children's opinions and achievements to have an impact on the wider community.

Involvement in environmental projects, competitions, conferences and community consultations increases pupil confidence, influences the broader community and may draw in funding for further action.

Conferences – Children's participation in practice

Conferences, by and for children, can contribute enormously to children's participation. However, like awards, it is very important that they build on current work and have genuine follow-up. By 1995, we felt that it would be valuable to have representation at the world's first International Children's Conference on the Environment at Eastbourne. Children from throughout Britain were asked to write a letter if they were interested in attending. On the strength of their letters about our school grounds development, two of our senior pupils were asked to join 800 other children from around the world. Craigellachie's whole school approach to sustainability was about to be taken to a wider audience! The girls, Cara and Lesley, also had a unique opportunity to share in the achievements of others. This had a bigger impact on the school and local community than any of us could have possibly imagined.



Leave it to us! (UN Conference)



"A girl from Australia got up and told us about her school for disabled children. They have a recycling station and recycle a whole range of household waste. The recycling station has been going for 12 years or more. After she finished talking, I think the adults had tears in their eyes! It is good to think that these children are doing wonderful things." *Lesley*

"I feel that Lesley and I learned a great deal more about the environment and it gave us the chance to mingle with other children from all over the world." *Cara*



Let's do it! (Moray Schools Conference)

Inspired by the Eastbourne Conference, Cara and Lesley were determined to share their experience with other children. After consulting fellow pupils at Craigellachie, they approached teaching staff with the ambitious idea of organising the first children's environmental conference in Moray.

Almost 160 children from 20 schools took part, along with environmental experts who answered questions and helped run workshops in Elgin Town Hall.

"We thought it would be good to invite other schools to listen to problems in their area and work with them on ideas." *Lesley*

Let's Do It!

In October 1995, Cara (11) and Lesley (10), two pupils from a small rural school in Moray, attended the International Children's Conference on the Environment at Eastbourne called "Leave It To Us".

As a result, "Let's Do It!" was conceived and is our attempt to pass on the message of sustainability to other children.

The aim of our conference is to provide the knowledge, skills and motivation that will encourage positive action at a local or global level by the year 2000.

The programme begins with a guest speaker and problem solving session assisted by a panel of experts. Music and drama on an environmental theme follows with a choice of twelve workshops, all with active participation. These are cross-curricular and linked to the 5-14 curriculum targets.

One hundred and seventy children are taking part! Cara and Lesley are delighted. They are also extremely grateful for the support they have received from local business, local councillors and environmental groups such as Watch, WWF and of course SEEC.

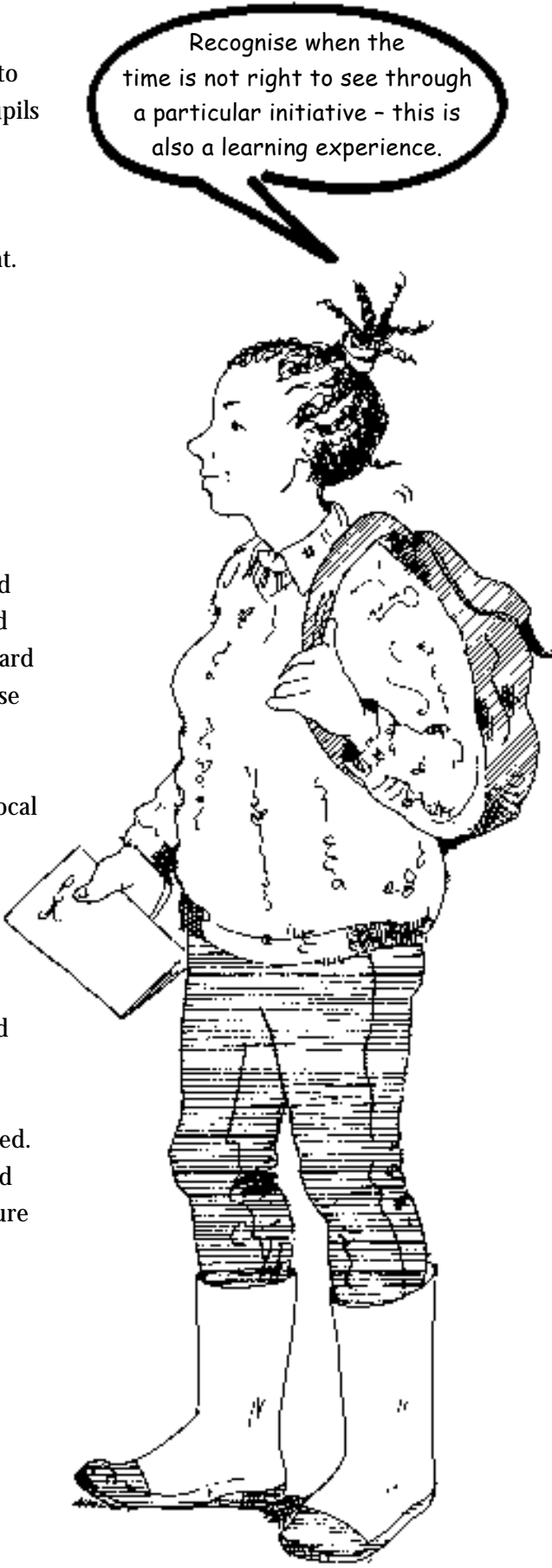
Source: SEEC Newsletter

The conference was very successful and children from a variety of schools came up with a raft of ideas to improve the local area. At Craigellachie, this included a plan to create a cycle pathway that would link our village to neighbouring settlements. This is proving to be more challenging than the children had first anticipated. The pupils are beginning to understand that negotiating agreements with land-owners and other interest groups can be a very slow business! The idea has not been abandoned, but has been placed to one side. The pupils didn't view this as a failure: the time was simply not right. Besides, as teachers, we were confident that the process itself had allowed the pupils to begin to develop some of the essential skills required in community participation. This was confirmed when the children were given the opportunity to take part in a consultation with respect to Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

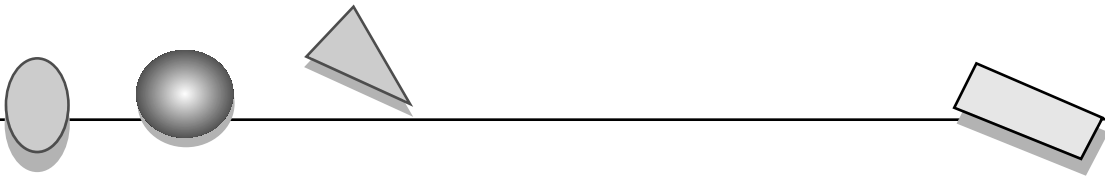
Backing biodiversity

Although initially apprehensive about consulting P6/7 children (10-11 year olds) on the future of our local woodland, Phil Whitfield of Forest Enterprise was pleasantly surprised by the experience and the outcomes of the exercise. The session was conducted as a standard adult-targeted activity. Our pupils had no problems with this because they were already familiar with the skills of brainstorming, group discussion and plenary sessions. They thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to influence changes to an important local amenity. They also recognised that these changes would, of course, only become effective as they grew up and became the community which would benefit.

The children came to the consultation without predetermined or personal agendas. As a result they were open to a range of ideas and possibilities. They were prepared to listen to other points of view. Their ideas were diverse, interesting, mostly relevant and feasible, but sometimes totally far-fetched. Some will actually be implemented. What a positive message to give children. They understood the need for biodiversity and the needs of other interests. As adults we are sure they will remember being part of the decision-making process that reshaped their local woodland.



Recognise when the time is not right to see through a particular initiative - this is also a learning experience.



1999 and beyond

Everything is growing well – sometimes too well it feels! This is decidedly a maintenance year in terms of plant life and planting. Nothing stands still, however, and our environmental policy continues to drive the curriculum in new directions, reflecting our on-going commitment to sustainability and Agenda 21 (the plan of action for the 21st century agreed by over 150 governments at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992).

A quiet corner

Thanks to CITB, the Construction Industry Training Board, we had a £500 grant to create a wildflower garden where children can read, eat lunch and quietly reflect.

Energy project

Energy was a major P6/7 theme this year and has led to a full audit of our energy consumption. With the help of Moray Council and Stewart King Environmental Engineers, we are devising an energy policy for the school. One of our major decisions was to use solar energy and we have now been awarded a grant from CREATE (a part government funded agency dedicated to energy education – visit www.create.org.uk for further information). We intend that this approach will become an integral part of school life to encourage values and behaviour that will take us into a sustainable 21st century.

Sustainability in a Speyside village

Waste and recycling is another popular Primary school topic and we are currently developing this theme as a community effort. The idea is to identify needs in the village and to jointly campaign for adequate recycling facilities. Like the cycle path, progress has been slow and the project is 'resting' at the moment. The right time will come, and at the end of the day the campaign is simply a vehicle to progress children's understanding and their ability to be active in changing a situation for the better.

The millennium

The year 2000 was our hundredth birthday and the occasion presented lots of opportunities to focus on our school grounds and the village – to celebrate in style!

What's this got to do with Education for Sustainable Development?

The following knowledge, skills and attitudes implicit in Education for Sustainable Development were encouraged throughout the project.

Knowledge and understanding

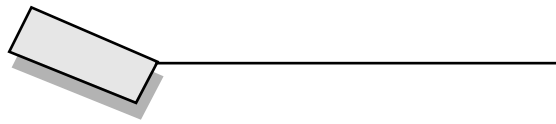
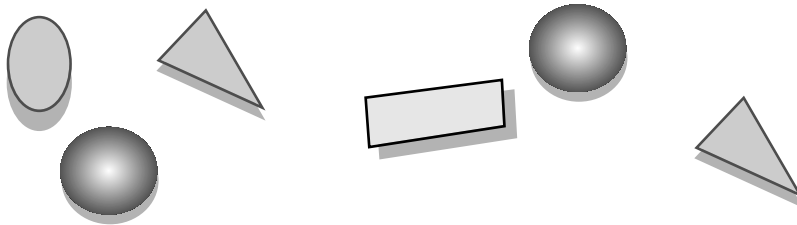
- how natural processes work
- globalisation and interdependence: how pupils' own lives and actions connect with those of others
- methods of providing for human needs and wants (eg energy and raw materials, human impact, environmental impact)
- how the processes of decision-making work and how to take part in them.

Skills

- co-operation and conflict resolution
- negotiation
- problem-solving
- reasoned debate: the ability to argue effectively
- informed decision-making
- creativity: the ability to envision alternatives.

Values and attitudes

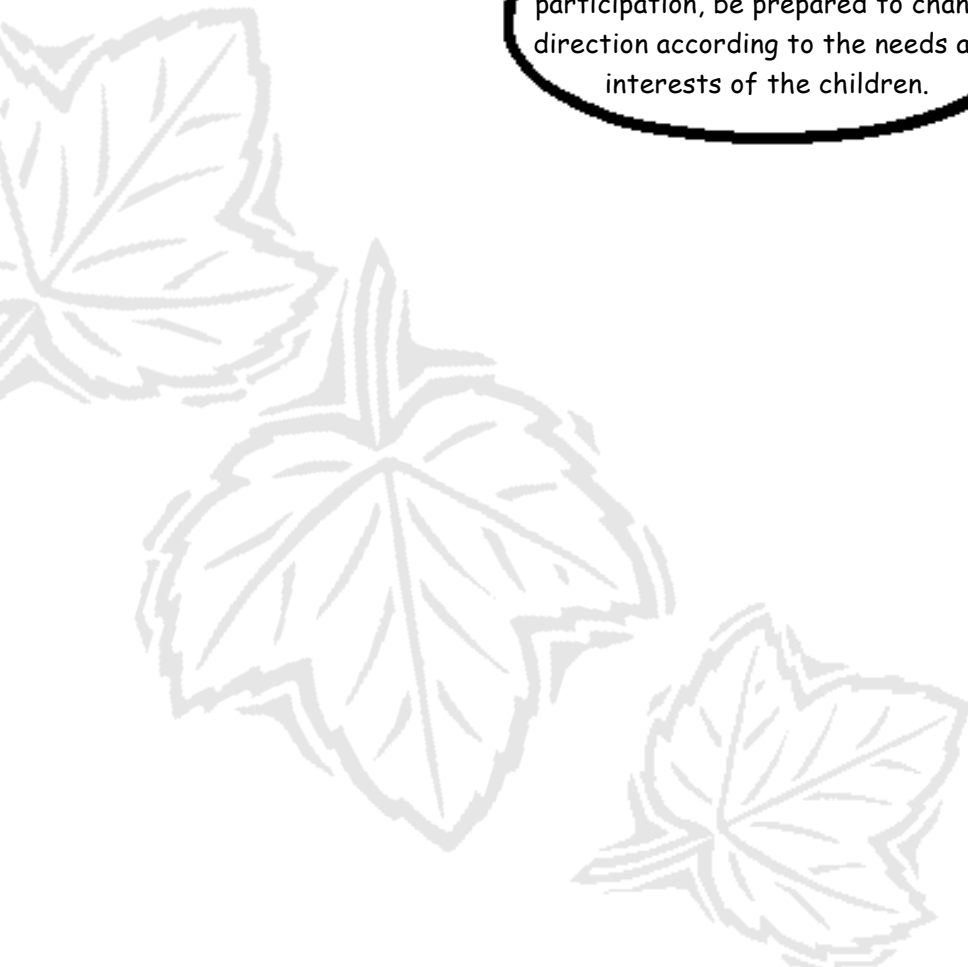
- a sense of identity and self-esteem
- a commitment to the well-being of all living things
- value and respect for diversity
- a commitment to social justice and equity
- empathy and awareness of the points of view of others
- an understanding that quality of life is not just dependent on standard of living
- an understanding of collective rights and responsibilities
- a desire to participate
- a belief that, working with others, people can make a difference
- a belief in a positive future.



Going with the flow

Sometimes things just don't go to plan and it is tempting to become frustrated and critical. For example, many of the possible solutions to our waste/recycling programme needed support and finance. This would have entailed many hours of staff time which was simply not available. Class/group dynamics changed, leading to a marked reduction in co-operation, motivation and interest among the senior pupils. We decided to go with the flow and postpone new developments until the following school year. For us, pupil participation is a key element and without it the learning experience is incomplete. The interests of the children are now leading us in different directions and the outcomes are changing. However, we are confident that whatever happens with our school grounds, there will be tangible results from our efforts. In addition, through their involvement the pupils will develop a genuine appreciation of democracy, and a sense of their own environmental responsibility and competence.

To encourage genuine participation, be prepared to change direction according to the needs and interests of the children.

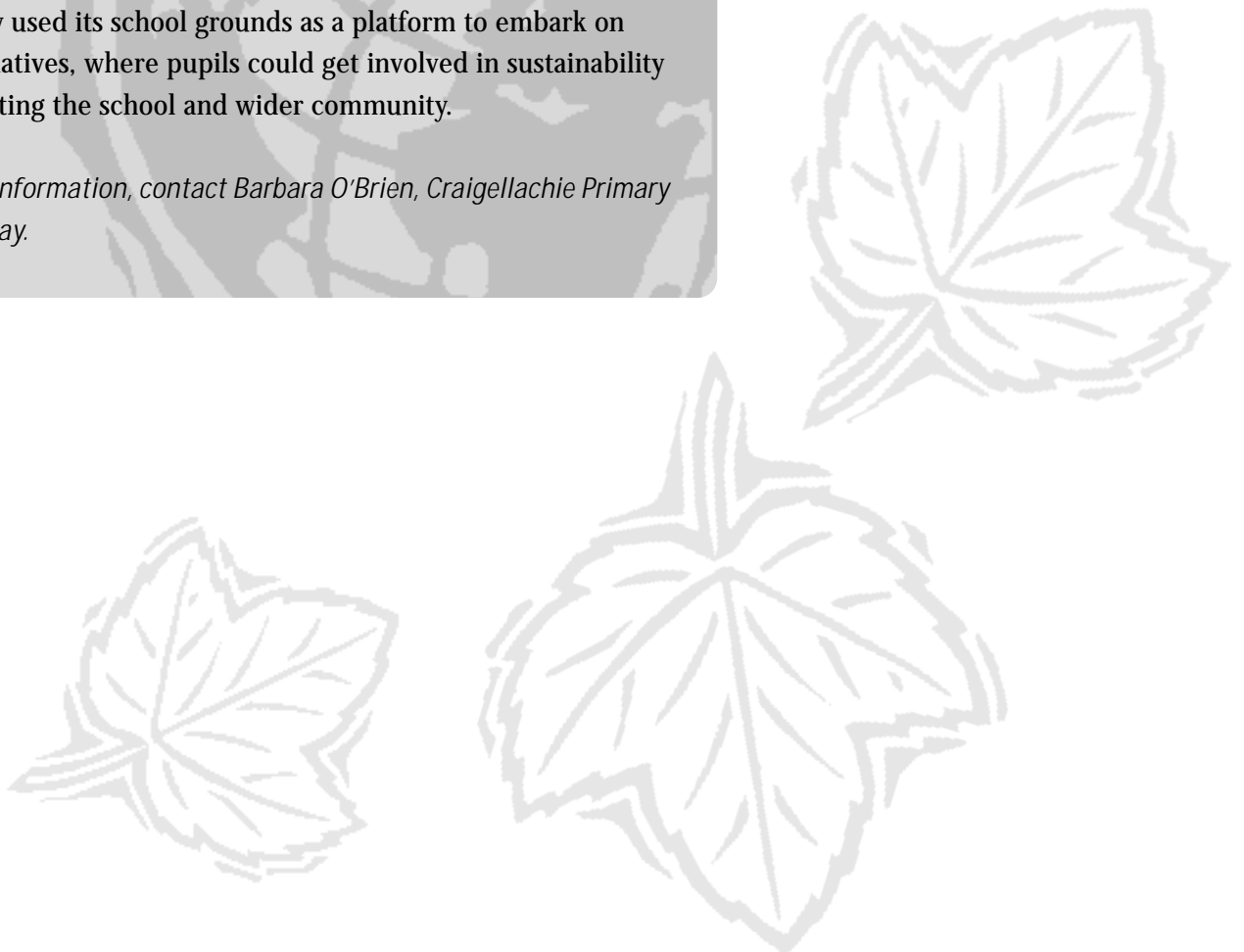


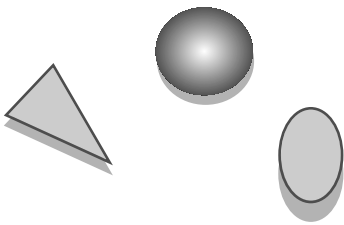
The school and its project

Craigellachie Primary School in rural Banffshire has four teachers and 71 pupils. For nearly ten years staff, pupils and the wider community have been involved in playground improvements. The project has been a huge success and the school has received numerous prizes and awards in recognition of their efforts. What makes this school different from others that have embarked on playground improvements? Children's participation lies at the heart of the initiative and an important message in the school is 'what children do matters'. The school firmly believes that when participation is taken seriously, children gain a genuine understanding of the democratic process and can begin to make valuable contributions to decisions that affect the whole community.

This case study describes how a small rural Primary school has successfully used its school grounds as a platform to embark on several initiatives, where pupils could get involved in sustainability issues affecting the school and wider community.

For further information, contact Barbara O'Brien, Craigellachie Primary School, Moray.





Valuable resources

Most of the inspiration for the work done has come from the children themselves as a consequence of their discussions within the school community, the research undertaken, and the variety of people from outside who visited the school and became involved. However, the following resources may be found useful:

Children's Participation, Roger Hart,

Earthscan/UNICEF. ISBN 1 85383 322 3.

Global Teacher, Global Learner, Graham Pike & David Selby, Hodder & Stoughton. ISBN 0 340 40261 X.

Grounds for Learning: a celebration of school site developments in Scotland, Kate Kenny, Learning through Landscapes, 1996. ISBN 1 87286 517 8.

Acknowledgements

Case study written by Joyce Gilbert, Gillian Symons and Lynnette Borradaile, based on a report written by Barbara O'Brien, Headteacher, Craiggellachie Primary School, Craiggellachie, Moray.

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Background

This case study is one of a series published by WWF-UK. Each one describes aspects of work undertaken by schools across the UK whilst involved in WWF professional and curriculum development programmes.

In Scotland, support was provided through the Bright Sparks Award Scheme – managed by WWF and sponsored by Scottish Hydro Electric – between 1996 and 2000.

The schemes focused on the 5-14 Environmental Studies Guidelines (for those outwith Scotland, this is the curriculum context for teaching science, social subjects and technology) which provide an opportunity for integrating the principles of Education for Sustainable Development. In particular, the schemes aimed to stimulate good policy and practice, demonstrating ways to integrate the 'Developing Informed Attitudes' strand within the guidelines. This is one way in which WWF helps develop ideas for new teaching and learning approaches – equipping students for thinking and acting in ways supporting the goals of sustainable development.



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